



Senator Sheila Kuehl

23rd District Newsletter • May 2006

The History of Health Risks Associated with the Rocketdyne Test Site

The Third of Four Articles

by Laura Plotkin, District Office Director

For years, residents near the Santa Susana Field Laboratory (SSFL) have expressed their concern that years and years of accidents, spills, and releases of radioactivity and chemical toxins had created a serious risk to public health. They were not alone. A number of studies have uniformly reinforced their concerns.

In 1990, the California Department of Health Services (DHS) conducted a study of the incidence

of cancer in the Los Angeles County census tracts nearest to the site. The study found a higher than normal rate of urinary bladder cancers in census tracts closest to SSFL. For some reason, DHS decided to keep the study a secret. When it was finally

made public, the bipartisan group of Assemblymembers representing the area at the time (Terry Friedman, Richard Katz, and Cathie Wright) convened a special hearing to demand that independent health studies be performed.

Pursuant to this demand, an independent panel of epidemiologists, other scientists, and community representatives was established, and they contracted with a team from the UCLA School of Public Health to study health impacts of those people who had been employed at the SSFL plant. The decision was made to study these impacts on the workers first, as there were better records regarding the workers' exposures, which were also assumed to be larger than for the public in general. If the workers were okay, then the community could be reassured; if, on the other hand, the workers showed evidence of harm from their exposures, another study would be conducted to assess impacts on the health of the surrounding community.

In 1997, the UCLA team, led by Professors Hal Morgenstern, Beate Ritz, and John Froines, released their findings on the effects of radiation exposures on the workers. They found the workers unquestioned exposure to external penetrating radiation was associated with elevated cancers of the blood, the lymph system, and the lungs. Cancer death rates for all cancers and for "radiosensitive" solid cancers were found to increase as radiation doses increased. Workers who had experienced the greatest exposures had three times the cancer death rate as less exposed workers. Increased internal radiation dose resulted in increased mortality rates for blood and lymph system cancers and cancers of the oral cavity, pharynx, esophagus and stomach. Twenty-seven percent of the cancer deaths among workers with measurable internal radiation exposures were attributable to their workplace exposures to radiation. The risks from radiation were about 6-8 times higher than radiation risks assumed by federal agencies, and workers exposed to doses below permissible levels under regulations nonetheless had clearly elevated cancer death rates, raising serious questions about the adequacy of current regulatory protections.

Around the same time, the Tri-Counties Regional
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27% of the cancer deaths among workers with measurable internal radiation exposures were attributable to their workplace exposures to radiation.

Civil Rights a Continued Priority for Senator Kuehl

SB 1437: Bias-Free Curriculum Act

SB 1437, the Bias-Free Curriculum Act, extends the same protections against bias in school curriculum that other underrepresented minorities now receive to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people.

Current law requires that the historical roles of traditionally underrepresented groups—including women, African-Americans, Native Americans, Mexican Americans, and Asian Pacific Islanders—be included in the curriculum, while prohibiting discrimination in instructional materials on the basis of race, sex, disability, nationality and religion. SB 1437 would expand this curricular inclusion to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, and expand the prohibition of discrimination to include sexual orientation and gender identity.

It is important that we expand these protections to include LGBT people because mention of their significant contributions to the history and social fabric of California is virtually non-existent in textbooks and other school instructional materials. LGBT students also lack protections that other groups of students currently have, that keep them from being forced to study negative stereotypes of their own community reflected in required instructional materials. Absent these legal protections, and lacking positive role models in their curriculum, LGBT youth may experience painful feelings of invisibility or worthlessness. Other students are also robbed of the opportunity to appreciate the diversity of talents in our state.

Despite a law that Senator Kuehl authored prohibiting discrimination in our public schools on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender, many students who are or are perceived to be LGBT are still experiencing a hostile climate in our schools. Silence and biased messages about LGBT people only contribute to that hostile school climate and place LGBT youth at greater risk for suicide, skipping school, drug and alcohol abuse and other risk taking behaviors.

Conversely, empirical research shows that schools with bias-free and LGBT-inclusive curricula promote greater feelings of student safety and lower rates of harassment and bullying. By prohibiting biased messages and requiring affirmative inclusion of LGBT people in the California curriculum, SB 1437 would not only bolster the self-confidence of LGBT students, but would enrich the learning experiences of all students and promote an atmosphere of safety and respect in California schools.

SB 1745: Employment & Housing Discrimination Protections for Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, and Stalking Victims

SB 1745 protects victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking from housing and employment discrimination. Victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking often face twin obstacles of discrimination in housing and employment as they struggle to put their lives back together.

This bill will ensure that victims of domestic violence,

CIVIL RIGHTS continued on page 4.



Senator Kuehl takes her District Office interns to lunch to discuss their take on California's issues at Junior's Deli on April 28, 2006. We are so grateful for their donation of time, interest, and help.

Pictured left to right: Tristan Blaine, Joe Goldman, Christopher Chan, Senator Kuehl, Carlos Lopez, Violeta Delgado, Chaunc'e Smith, and Sarah Leff.

The Budget Process

*By Bill Craven, Chief Consultant,
Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee and
Keely Bosler, Consultant,
Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee*

The state constitution requires the annual budget to be passed before midnight on June 15. We all read the negative headlines when the deadline is not met, but we seldom, if ever, see stories in the media about what goes into putting a budget together for a state as large and diverse as California. In this short article, we want to try to convey a sense of the Legislature's role in approving and appropriating funds in the annual budget act. Our experience is drawn largely from our jobs staffing Senator Kuehl in her role as chair of the Senate Budget Subcommittee on Resources, Environmental Protection and Energy, but the same process is used to evaluate the various budget sections related to education, health care, and all the rest.

Budget Introduction On January 10 of each year, the Governor proposes a budget to the Legislature. Shortly thereafter, we start to work in the budget subcommittees evaluating the budget sections under our purview and sometimes proposing changes to the Governor's budget proposal to reflect what the Senators on the Budget sub-committee believe is in the best interests of the people of California. Over the next five months, we hold numerous hearings to review the Governor's budget proposal and during this process we hear a significant amount of testimony from the affected agencies and the public about each proposal.

Budget Oversight The Senate Budget Subcommittee on Resources, Environmental Protection, and Energy, chaired by Senator Kuehl, oversees all of the boards, departments, and offices that comprise the Resources Agency, the California Environmental Protection Agency, the California Department of Food and Agriculture, and the California Public Utilities Commission. In total, our budget subcommittee evaluates the budgets of 39 different departments.

The majority of our time in the subcommittee is spent evaluating the budgets of the departments that comprise the Resources Agency and the Environmental Protection Agency, which are responsible for the protection and enhancement of the state's natural resources. These two agen-

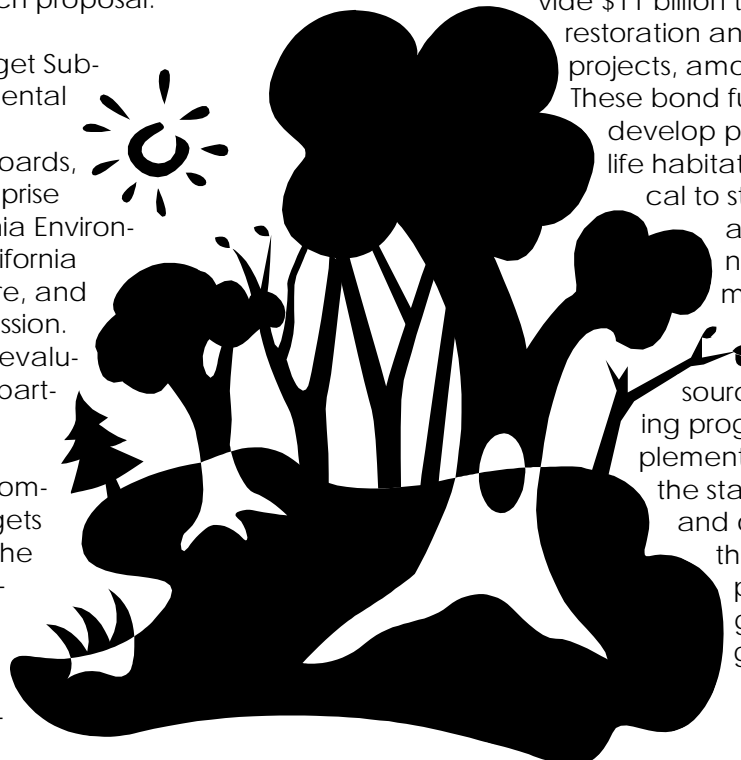
cies account for less than 2 percent of the state's overall budget, but the programs they manage have a tremendous impact on the health of the environment in which we live.

Budget Resources Some may wonder why we spend so many hours in the budget subcommittee evaluating resources and environmental protection programs when they account for such a small portion of the budget. The answer is, that because so little money is dedicated to resources and environmental protection programs, we have to make very thoughtful investments that maximize the benefits to all Californians. For example, over the past decades we have made progress in reducing air pollution, improving water quality, and securing open space and parks. However, this has not happened only because of changes in state law. The work we do on the budget to ensure that programs are adequately staffed and funded is critical to realizing the goals set forth in legislation. Without adequate funding for resources and environmental programs in the budget, progress is slowed in implementing laws that restore and enhance the state's natural resources.

As you know the state has been faced with a significant structural deficit over the past several years. This has greatly and negatively impacted the amount of funding available to fund resources and environmental protection programs. Fortunately, during this same time, voters have approved bond measures that provide \$11 billion to fund environmental

restoration and land acquisition projects, among other things.

These bond funds have helped to develop parks and restore wildlife habitats and have been critical to state efforts to restore and enhance California's natural environment. However, bond funds are not an appropriate funding source for staff and ongoing programs that ensure implementation of the laws of the state. The costs of staff and other expenditures that are needed to support regulatory programs and other programs that protect the



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Forty Youth Graduate From KEYS Program

by *Hilda Garcia, District Office Field Representative*

On April 13th, in Oxnard, California, a unique non-profit organization called Keys to Empower You in the System Academy (KEYS) graduated 40 at-risk youth. This program builds leadership, organizing and empowerment skills to at-risk youth and their families in the communities of Oxnard. The curriculum empowers youth by taking a multi-disciplined approach to problem-solving and community activism.

KEYS is a 15-week college preparatory module that meets after school three days a week. The 15 week program provides instruction to prepare the students for GED and community college admission requirements, as well as career development, software skills training, adult mentoring support, ongoing testing and assessment, and bi-weekly stipends for students who attend three days a week. If one class is missed, the stipend is reduced.

Since 2001, the KEYS program has enrolled 116 youth who were being adjudicated in the juvenile justice sys-

tem. Of this number, 79% went on to enroll in college and 82% improved their basic skills by at least one grade level.

In 2004, the foundation was recognized by The California Wellness Foundation as one of the 19 Best Programs in the State of California for preventing youth violence. In addition, the Foundation has received numerous awards and citations from local and state governments for creating a unique alternative for the most at-risk youth in the Ventura County area. KEYS has also received recognition for its creative, grass-roots approaches to empowering



the community in areas such as farmworker rights, voter registration, civil rights organizing and youth awareness and empowerment activities.

Congratulations to the graduating class of 2006. Your courage, hard work and commitment have paid off! Always believe in yourself and never give up. Anything is possible! ❖

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sexual assault and stalking can depend on stable housing when they need it most, when the alternatives are homelessness or going back to an abusive home. It will also enhance the victims' ability to protect their jobs, which if lost, exacerbate their trauma through a snowball effect: eviction for non-payment of rent, and subsequent dislocation and homelessness of victims and their children.

Amending California law will send a clear message to landlords, tenants, employers and employees, that it is unlawful to discriminate against victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking based on their status as victims of these crimes.

SB 1441: Discrimination-Free Government Funded Services & Programs

State and local governments provide many important services and programs, including police and fire protection, recreational programs, social services and public schools. Though under current law a per-

son cannot be discriminated against in housing, employment, education, or public accommodation on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity, because there are no prohibitions in current law regarding state services, a person can still be denied public services on these bases.

Under existing law, individuals applying for or participating in programs and activities operated, administered or funded by the state cannot be discriminated against on the basis of race, national origin, ethnic group identification, religion, age, sex, color or disability. SB 1441 updates this list of prohibited bases of discrimination to include sexual orientation and gender identity. The bill also clarifies that the protections are also available for any person perceived to have, or perceived to be associated with another person who has, any of the characteristics enumerated in this prohibition against discrimination in state operated or funded programs.

SB 1441 (Kuehl) simply ensures that Californians have fair and equal treatment in services that are being funded by, or with the assistance of, public dollars. ❖

Actors Raise Funds and Awareness about Healthcare Crisis

By Emily Gold, District Office Field Representative

Musicians, actors and passionate supporters came out en masse to the San Fernando Valley for a gala event at the I.A.T.S.E. Local 80 Soundstage in Burbank. The "April Faux Premier" raised both money and awareness for SB 840, State Senator Sheila Kuehl's single-payer universal health insurance legislation, which is currently moving through the California State Legislature.

Spearheaded by the recently formed San Fernando Valley Chapter of the statewide organization Health Care For All (HCA), including the chapter's co-directors Sharon Stevens and Don Schroeder, the April Faux Premier showcased sketches highlighting California's healthcare crisis, starring actors Ed Asner, Ed Begley Jr., Marcia Strassman, Hector Elizondo, as well as David L. Lander and Cindy Williams of TV's *Laverne & Shirley*. Lily Tomlin and her alter ego, Ernestine, made a special guest appearance, keeping the audience shrieking as Ernestine answered the phone at the "Claims and Denials... and they're all Denials" department of a private health insurance company.

"You're alive now? Sorry, that's a pre-existing condition!"

Folksinger Ross Altman sang his own healthcare inspired tunes that had the audience members on their feet and dancing. Mr. Asner, true to form, kept the 600



member audience in stitches throughout the night with his witty and articulate attack on the private health insurance industry.

The San Fernando Valley Chapter of HCA, founded last November, is dedicated to ensuring accessible and affordable healthcare coverage for all California residents. The goal for co-directors Don Schroeder (veteran film producer) and Sharon Stevens, and their entirely volunteer-driven campaign, is to produce an educational film detailing the healthcare crisis faced in California and the solution proposed by SB 840. This ten to twelve minute documentary will be shown to house parties, town hall meetings, church and synagogue groups and audiences throughout the state.

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Cancer Registry did a brief review of cancer rates in Ventura County and found elevated lung cancers in census tracts closest to SSFL.

In 1999, the UCLA team issued the second part of its study, on effects of exposures to chemicals from the rocket test stands. UCLA found elevated rates of death from cancers of the lung, blood, and lymph system, as well as bladder and kidney associated with exposures to chemicals at the rocket test stands, presumably hydrazine, a rocket test fuel component. The SSFL Advisory Panel continues its work, currently reviewing potential risks to offsite communities; these studies are to be released in the fall.

Last February, two multi-year studies funded by the U.S. Agency for Toxic Disease Registry were released. One, by Dr. Yoram Cohen of UCLA, found that very high levels of toxic chemicals were released into the areas surrounding SSFL, at concentrations far in excess of EPA

acceptable levels, with the highest risk being within two miles of the site. The second study, by Dr. Hal Morgenstern, formerly of UCLA and now at the University of Michigan, found cancer rates in the surrounding community increased the closer one got to SSFL, again with the highest risk being within two miles of the site. He also found significant increases in those cancers presumed to be radiosensitive and those associated with chemical exposures.

UCLA's Dr. Beate Ritz has recently published follow-up studies of the SSFL workers, with more data and deaths to add to the review. Her studies have confirmed the prior UCLA worker studies, finding radiation and chemical exposures resulted in greater than normal cancer deaths. A full picture of the health effects from the Rocketdyne site is still not available. But the numerous studies performed to date paint a troubling picture, one that reinforces the need to get the contamination at the site cleaned up so that there are no further, preventable cancers associated with the decades of pollution at SSFL. ❖

The Legacy of Will Rogers Continues

By *Laura Plotkin*
District Office Director

At the March 26th rededication of the Will Rogers State Historic Park, a day filled with reminiscences by family members and acquaintances of the great humorist, the recently restored grandeur of this local landmark was celebrated throughout the day. Improvements to the 186.5 acre park made over the past three years by state parks staff, working with local historian/activist Randy Young, include a refurbished ranch house and barn, restored hiking and riding trails and a restored landscape adjoining the polo field where Hollywood's elite, including Clark Gable and Spencer Tracy, played and picnicked over the years beginning in the late 1920s.



The property was deeded to the state in 1944 by Rogers' widow, Betty Rogers, as a memorial to her husband who had died in a plane crash in 1935. On hand for the festivities were the Governor, as well as California's first lady, Maria Shriver, State Parks Director, Ruth Coleman, and Rogers family members, including grandsons Ken and Chuck Rogers, as well as several great grandchildren.

It was a real thrill for me to see the cozy office with the desk and typewriter where Will Rogers wrote his daily column, a very popular mix of politics and humor, which appeared in many newspapers across the country in the mid 1930's—a time when he was also a major movie box office attraction. The desk and chair where he sat are back-dropped by a large window with a broad view of the trees and lawn, behind which sits the trail-studded hillside where, after slipping out down the stairs near his desk, he would take a break and ride his horse to clear his mind so he could continue his writing later in the afternoon. I couldn't help picturing him there, rocking back his head and laughing at his own jokes as he typed away.

Ron Schafer of State Parks, Laura Plotkin of Senator Kuehl's office and Assemblymember Fran Pavely on the Ranch House lawn at the rededication ceremony of the Will Rogers State Historic Park and Grand Reopening of the Ranch House in Pacific Palisades on Saturday, March 25, 2006. Photo courtesy of Louise Rishoff.

I thought about a simpler, more innocent time in the life of Americans as I looked at early editions of Wizard of Oz books on the shelves in the children's rooms, western gear, including ropes and saddles, and native American baskets and blankets in the living room, original appliances in the kitchen and family photos throughout the ranch house. During the day, thousands of neighbors and park visitors came to revisit this special place from their youth, or to bring their children to see it for the first time and take a unique glimpse into our collective past. They came too, to honor the boy who began life in 1879 in Indian Territory, of mixed-blood members of the Cherokee Nation, who grew to become the man who made the whole country laugh and who finally became the legend who "never met a man he didn't like." This 23rd State Senate District treasure is located at 1501 Will Rogers State Park Road in Pacific Palisades, and park hours are from 8 am to sunset everyday. Tours are available by reservation. For more information, call (310) 454-8212. ❖

23rd Senate District. *The 23rd Senate District includes the cities of Agoura Hills, Beverly Hills, Calabasas, Hidden Hills, Malibu, Oxnard, Port Hueneme, Santa Monica, West Hollywood and Westlake Village and the communities of Bel Air, Brentwood, Canoga Park, Encino, Hollywood, Mt. Olympus, Pacific Palisades, Sherman Oaks, Studio City, Tarzana, Topanga, West Los Angeles, West Hills, Westwood and Woodland Hills.*



The Role of a Legislative Director

*By Jennifer Richard, Legislative Director
The Second in a Series*

In Senator Kuehl's office the Legislative Director is responsible for coordinating the Senator's legislative agenda. During the interim and at the beginning of each legislative year, I gather the legislative proposals Senator



Kuehl receives from constituents, advocates and other interested parties, and assign those bill proposals to staff for review based on the staff's policy interests and expertise. I also work with staff in developing legislative proposals that have emerged from their work for the Senator or from the Senator's own interests during the past year. In the course of developing and reviewing policy proposals, our office will consult with the appropriate policy committee staff, agency staff,

and other potential interested parties. Our office will often request research analyses and policy recommendations from the Senate Office of Research. We also rely upon librarians at the California State Library to gather research materials for us on a particular policy area that we are reviewing for the Senator.

In addition to coordinating the review and analysis of various policy proposals, as the Legislative Director I also ensure that each legislative year includes a good mix of bills representing the Senator's policy priorities. These priorities include: universal healthcare and other health issues, domestic violence, civil rights in education and the workplace, water and other environmental issues, work and family balance, transportation, incarcerated women and children, foster care, family law, and district specific issues as they emerge.

In addition to trying to balance the Senator's legislative and policy agenda for the year I also work with staff to ensure that the legislative work load is balanced and considerate of other work staff is assigned to perform for the Senator.

As policy ideas are vetted and ranked by the staff, the proposals are brought to Senator Kuehl for her review and initial feedback. In the initial review, Senator Kuehl provides the staff with a sense of her interest in a particular policy proposal. In that initial discussion the Senator also often raises additional questions about the policy proposal that she would like staff to explore and brief her on in further detail. After the Senator has expressed an initial interest in carrying legislation addressing a particular policy issue the staff will provide the Senator with a draft of the language that would implement the policy change in California law. Sometimes advocacy organizations participate in drafting an initial draft of the bill language, while at other times, staff works with advocates, committee staff, and other experts in drafting the policy language from scratch. After the bill language is developed and vetted by staff, it is given to Senator Kuehl, a former law professor, for careful review.

I feel very blessed to work with a talented staff team serving Senator Kuehl in the Capitol, Committee, and District offices that is strongly committed to doing good policy work for the people of California.

Once the initial draft bill language is approved by Senator Kuehl, it is submitted by staff to the office of Legislative Counsel, the office which must develop the actual language for the version of the bill at its introduction. In that process, Legislative Counsel will often revise the bill language, which means the staff must review it again to ascertain if changes made by Legislative Counsel were appropriate. Sometimes, staff or the Senator will decide that the bill as prepared for introduction by Legislative Counsel must be sent back for further revisions. Finally, after the language has been thoroughly reviewed by staff and approved one last time by Senator Kuehl, it is put across the Senate desk for "introduction" and given a bill num-

LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR continued on page 8.

ber. As the Legislative Director, I provide staff, particularly the new staff members, with guidance through the entire process of the initial review of proposals, developing bill language, and introducing new legislation. I also review and develop my own legislative proposals for the Senator that I will staff for her over the coming year.

This period of coordinating the review and introduction of new legislation at the beginning of the legislative year is one of the busiest periods for me in my role as Legislative Director. Over the course of the year, I continue to guide staff on shepherding bills through the legislative process including policy and fiscal committees, floor strategy, movement to the other House and all processes there. I also continue to focus on mentoring junior staff members, guiding my own legislation for the Senator through the legislative process, and provide other staff support as needed.

I feel very blessed to work with a talented staff team serving Senator Kuehl in the Capitol, Committee, and District offices that is strongly committed to doing good policy work for the people of California. We all feel that it is a pleasure to serve a legislator as highly esteemed as Senator Kuehl and to have the opportunity to work on policy issues that make a difference in the lives of Californians. These factors make my work as Senator Kuehl's Legislative Director a true pleasure. ❖

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environment require funding from user fees as well as the General Fund. These programs have suffered and environmental protections have, in some cases, been reduced because of the General Fund deficits.

Areas of Emphasis Over the past two years our budget subcommittee has taken an especially close look at the Department of Fish and Game. The funding for this department has been reduced tremendously over the past ten years while, at the same time, a number of new laws have been passed that have increased its workload. The combination of reductions in funding and increases in workload have resulted in a badly broken department that is having a difficult time meeting its most basic mandate of protecting the state's fish and wildlife resources. Our work over the past two years has resulted in reforms at the department that we hope will address issues of accountability that have plagued the department. However, more funding is needed so that the department can be successful in meeting its statutory mandates. Last year the subcommittee added nearly \$20 million from General Fund monies to Fish and Game's budget. However,



Lily Tomlin.

The California State Senate and the Assembly Health Committee have passed SB840. "I'm devoted to Sheila Kuehl," Tomlin said backstage. "If anyone can get this bill through, I have great faith that she can."

Established in 1995, Health Care For All (www.hca.org) has led the movement for single payer legislation across California. They began with successfully sponsored legislation which led to several studies confirming the financial benefit of single-payer universal health care -- not only for the government, but also for individuals and businesses statewide. ❖

the Governor vetoed the vast majority of these funds. Senator Kuehl hopes this year we will be more successful in increasing funding for the Department of Fish and Game so that we can be assured that our fish and wildlife resources will be protected for generations.

The budget subcommittee has also spent a goodly amount of time on the budget of the Department of Parks and Recreation. The California State Parks system is one of the crown jewels of our state and there are, of course, some wonderful state parks in Senator Kuehl's Senate District. However, funding for the State Park system has been reduced dramatically over the past several years due to the reduced availability of General Fund monies. This has resulted in a state park system that has a badly deteriorating infrastructure and lacks adequate staffing to provide public access on all State Park properties. Last year the subcommittee added over \$10 million in General Fund monies to help the State Park system regain some of its luster. Unfortunately, these funds were vetoed by the Governor. Senator Kuehl hopes to be more successful this year in finding ways to increase funding for State Parks so that we can continue to be proud of one of the most remarkable networks of parks in the world. ❖